

September 4, 2010

President Joe Colvin
American Nuclear Society
555 N. Kensington Ave
La Grange, IL 60526-5535
www.ans.org

Re: Significant deficiencies exist in the scope and implementation of engineering ethics in general and ANS code of ethics in particular - and how this impedes, possibly precludes, a "nuclear renaissance"

Dear President Colvin,

When Admiral Rickover interviewed me for his program in 1976, I indicated I would be a trustworthy engineer.

By dint of 18 years of much "suffering for righteousness' sake" in defending and upholding my profession of engineering, its code of ethics, and the public health and safety (as well as the "merit system principles" of the federal civil service) as a professional engineer (PE) employed by the Department of Energy as a nuclear safety engineer, I have become an influential member of mankind's largest and most global profession of engineering, whose 20 million degreed members collectively hold civilization and much of the natural environment in their hands as well as an influential member of America's federal civil service, whose 2 million members have essential responsibilities for America's health, safety, welfare, and security.

ANS has been conspicuous by its absence. I wish I had a nickel for every time I have been told "good luck" by nuclear professionals and other engineers. Engineering ethics, including ANS code of ethics, as well as the quite similar "rules of professional conduct" of State Engineering Boards are fundamentally unethical - why should any engineer risk his job and career to protect others when the profession "washes its hands" of any collective responsibility to defend its code of ethics when offended by an employer or client of an engineer. So, while at one level I do take it personally that ANS has been AWOL, at another I do not - ANS has never shown up for anyone in such a situation.

Whenever I say this to someone as you, I get b.s. excuses (yeah, like Rickover, I'm blunt) that evade the issue. I completely agree that a professional society cannot "take sides" in a disputed issue between an engineer and his employer. But when a final, unappealable outcome, reached via rule of law is obtained that finds the employer in the wrong, the profession certainly can and should, if not must, "go on record" in criticism of the legally established facts. But it will not, making engineering ethics such much eyewash and the foolhardy engineer just a "speeding ticket" to the employer - a strategic win, if fact, because it intimidates other concerned engineers into silence.

I played an important, perhaps essential, role in ANS re-writing its code of ethics <www.ans.org/about/coe/> approaching 10 years ago. Yes, they are nice words, but they are b.s. as implemented. In fact, ANS has not in its 55 year history, apparently ever: 1) investigated an ethics complaint against a member, per ANS Rule R3.4.7 “Disciplinary Procedure,” see page 8 of ANS Rules <www.ans.org/about/br/docs/rules.pdf>, or 2) criticized an employer or client of an ANS member for its legally established record of unlawfully punishing that member for adhering to it in the course of his professional duty. So ANS is based on a foundation of b.s., because it claims that adherence to its code of ethics is a requirement of membership - and its code of ethics is b.s. in actual implementation.

Now, you can blow me off, but I think that would be dishonorable and we were both officers in the Navy, where honor meant something. I openly claim that ANS - the organization you now head - is not trustworthy enough to believe in its statements about nuclear safety, given the facts about its implementation of its code of ethics. I hope you find that disturbing - disturbing enough to ascertain the facts and take appropriate action. Until you do, I will presume you will not, based on my extensive interactions with ANS leadership over the years. (Or you can amaze me by filing an ethics complaint against me in ANS, claiming I am violating ANS Code of Ethics, rule of professional practice 5, in my failing to “issue public statements and make presentations on professional matters in an objective and truthful manner.”)

Whether nuclear power is “safe” enough for a nuclear renaissance is a societal decision - there is no riskless way to power a modern society. But nuclear power, in my considered opinion, cannot be adequately “safe” unless nuclear professionals are adequately trustworthy. This requires - among other possible things - the ANS Code of Ethics to be more than the eyewash it now is; PE licensure needs to be the norm for engineers involved with nuclear facilities, instead of the almost rare exception; and federal employees with responsibilities for nuclear safety (as other employees) must be adequately protected from reprisal and other “prohibited personnel practices.”

Respectfully,

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longtime member, held numerous leadership positions, ANS, ASME, NSPE, AAAS

twice nominated for AAAS “Scientific Freedom and Responsibility” award,
<<http://www.aaas.org/aboutaaas/awards/freedom/index.shtml>>

twice winner of NSPE’s Annual Milton F. Lunch Engineering Ethics prize

<http://www.nspe.org/Ethics/EthicsResources/MiltonLunch/index.html>

“multiple-time prevailing” whistleblower Department of Energy
<<http://whsknox.blogs.com/dpo>>

President, Affiliation of Christian Engineers <www.ChristianEngineer.org>

Chief engineer in Vols4STEM <www.Vols4STEM.org>

copy: Other stakeholders to trustworthy nuclear professionals and an ANS that defends and upholds its code of ethics